

Norwich Bulletin: Our view: Help for dairy farms commendable

We applaud Congressman Courtney's efforts on behalf of the region's and state's dairy industry

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In an editorial last month applauding the state's \$20 million plan to aid dairy farmers, we noted that real relief would require federal action. Milk prices, which have fallen 30 percent since 2008, are set by the federal government. Today's dairy farmers are spending far more to produce a gallon of milk than what they are paid for it.

Today, we applaud U.S. Rep. Joe Courtney, D-2nd District, for his leadership in bringing about the necessary changes on the federal level to provide that relief. Legislation providing \$350 million to aid dairy farmers has been agreed to by a congressional conference committee and is expected to be approved within the next week or two. If approved on time, funding will be flowing to farmers in December.

It is not yet known how much of those funds will be allocated to Connecticut farmers. That determination will be made by the federal Department of Agriculture based on criteria yet to be formulated.

However, as Peter Orr, co-owner of Fort Hill Farms in Thompson, said recently, having Congress recognize the magnitude of the problem is a significant step forward in providing the relief needed.

\$1 billion a year

Connecticut's dairy farms are a \$1 billion a year industry, a major contributor to the state's overall economy. However, because of rising operating costs and declining prices, many dairy farmers are finding it increasingly difficult to remain in business. Over the past 20 years, the number of dairy farms in Connecticut has fallen from 500 to just 150.

Courtney, whose district includes all of Eastern Connecticut with its many dairy farms, is co-chairman of, and was instrumental in forming, the 87-member Congressional Dairy Farmers Caucus. The caucus led the effort to secure the federal assistance and funding for dairy farms.

In addition to those efforts, Courtney has also nominated Orr for a spot on a newly created 15-member dairy advisory committee to Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. Having a Connecticut representative on the committee would be another important step forward in preserving our dairy industry.